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CHRISTIANITY

THE

ONLY TRUE THEOLOGY;

OR,

AN ANSWER

TO

MR. PAINE'S AGE OF REASON.

BY A CHURCHMAN.

We have not followed cunningly devised fables,

2 Pet. i. 16.

Coelum ipsum petimus, stultitia.

Horace.

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A N
A N S W E R
T O
PAINE'S AGE OF REASON.

THE interests of Revelation in every age, have either been opposed by the malice of enemies, or betrayed by the indiscretion of friends. In the primeval ages of the world, it found a powerful adversary in the ignorance and barbarism of the times. No sooner did the rays of Revelation, which then were feeble, and solitary, and scattered, descend from on high, than they were extinguished in the darkness which invested the land.

As it increased in lustre and extended the circle of its influence, new opponents started up, and new sources of opposition were opened. The standard of idolatry was erected in proud defiance of the God of Palestine, and the principles of the true religion, which were early delivered, were soon confounded with the fictions of the Heathen
B Mythology.

Mythology. The prophets, to whom were entrusted the sacred oracles, were spurned, and persecuted, and slain by their ungrateful countrymen, and the priests to whom the service of religion was committed, were driven from the altars at which they ministered, and in a foreign land were compelled to pay the ransom of their lives by kneeling at the shrines of strange Gods, whom neither they nor their fathers knew.

When in the fulness of time the sun of righteousness arose, in whom all the lines of prophecy centered, revelation shone with an effulgence unknown before. The strength of opposition increased in proportion. The heathen raged, the princes of the earth combined against the anointed of the Lord. The Jew and the Gentile, the Greek and the Barbarian, the Pharisee and the Saducee were content to drop their mutual animosities for a time, and with one accord to conspire in defeating the purpose of the Almighty.

In spite of their malicious efforts, by the gentle arts of persuasion, and the native force of truth, the religion of Jesus was rapidly propagated thro' Asia, Africa, and Europe, Churches were planted in every country; the followers of the Prince of Peace daily multiplied; their numbers and respectability damped the zeal of their adversaries; and the increasing triumphs of Christianity, circumscribed

circumscribed the empire of Heathenism within a narrower compass than the world had ever witnessed.

But no sooner did the Church find herself secure from the attacks of external foes, than the monster of discord arose within her walls, and sounded the alarm of controversial war. Her sons, with tumultuous uproar, were mustered in hostile bands, and the ties of consanguinity burst before the fierce effusions of party zeal. The temple of God, which, when it came down from Heaven, exhibited one fair and stately structure, was garbled by the hands of adverse assailants into a rude mass of disjointed materials; and its doctrines, like so many stones, each grasped according to his weight, and dashed in the teeth of his antagonist! Creeds and confessions, framed of words without sense, and subscribed with zeal without meaning, in the idea of those turbulent sons of controversy supplanted that pure and undefiled religion, which is before God and the Father. The scholastic jargon of philosophy was substituted in their discourses in room of the mild simplicity of the Gospel. In their general Councils excommunications and anathemas were issued without distinction against all who had the presumption to arrogate the right of judging for themselves in matters of conscience. Religious feuds and holy wars followed apace, and the prophecy of Jesus, that he

was not come to send peace on earth, but a sword was literally fulfilled.

After the tumult of controversy had in some measure subsided, and a more enlightened philosophy had liberated the minds of men from the shackles of ignorance, which authority had been wont to impose, they run to the opposite extreme, and in the licentiousness of Deism, endeavoured to atone to the freedom of their minds for their former tameness of spirit. In France and Italy, about the middle of the 16th century, the abettors of this system first called the public attention. Toward the beginning of last century the principles of Deism made their way into England; and in the present age they found an able support in some of our most distinguished literary characters. But ingenious and subtle, as their reasonings were, and copious as the writings of some of them are in the embellishments of language, the fallacy of their principles have been clearly detected, and their arguments compleatly overturned, in the masterly apologies of some of our divines.

As late, however, as the year 1784, Thomas Paine comes forward to take his leave of the public, boldly avows himself a Deist, and as an apology for his creed, rakes up the dying embers of a few objections which I suppose no person but himself

himself would have considered as containing one spark that was capable of being revived. A daring spirit of innovation, which is disgusted with whatever bears the stamp of antiquity, and is continually busied in projecting new arrangements for the moral and political conduct of mankind, seems to form a prominent feature in the character of Mr. Paine. 'Tis not long since he proscribed the governments of Europe, new modelled the plans of political œconomy, made an effort to release mankind from the shackles in which his penetrating eye saw them bound, proclaimed the triumphs of equality, and sung the funeral dirge of kings. But the world did not listen to the song of the Syren; his spell was suddenly dissolved, and his enchantments lost their power to deceive. His attempts are baffled, but his spirit is not broken. The redoubtable hero of the Rights of Man, having ingloriously terminated his political career in the secret recess of Parisian dungeon, grasps the cudgels of infidelity, and forms the hardy design of demolishing the pillars of our religion. Reason is conjured to his aid, and by its incantations, Jesus of Nazareth is called to bow, and the fabric of Christianity to disappear.

5 It is the glory of the age in which we live, that it is an age of reason. Philosophy hath unrolled her ample page, and science hath diffused her light to guide us in the search of truth. Free and candid

did inquiry is never discountenanced, statements of difficulties are patiently heard, and objections are never repelled till they are answered, implicit faith is no longer recommended, and truth, from whatever quarter it comes, will find a warm and general reception. In such a period, I have no doubt that Mr. Paine's publication will meet with a candid perusal, though I have too high an opinion of the discernment of the age to flatter him with the hopes of a numerous sect of adherents. When the Philosophers of old, were wrangling about their Crystalline sky, and their vortex of æther, the Planets revolved equally unmindful of the new systems and of the old. The champion of equality may declaim on the unprescriptible rights of man, and the absurdity of monarchical power, he may decry religious establishment, as monopolies of power and profit, and he may slander revelation as an imposture; but, for the comfort of man, I trust Kings will sit on their Thrones, when Paine is gone to his Fathers; church establishments will exist, when his rights of man are no more known, and the Bible will be read, when the age of reason has passed down the stream of oblivion.

Mr. Paine has conducted his investigation without much regard to method, and frequently interspersed miscellaneous observations, which are little connected with the subjects of discussion. Indeed, through the whole of the pamphlet, there is a
much

much greater proportion of illiberal satyr, and impertinent witticism, than are consistent with a serious and impartial examination of truth. The greatest praise which we can bestow on this production, is, that it is perfectly consistent, not perhaps with the former sentiments, but with the other principles of the author. In his political tracts he found the scriptures the best engine, which he could use to play off his insidious doctrines upon the minds of the people. Accordingly he perverted several passages of scripture, which seemed to offer the strongest sanction to his schemes, in order to impose upon the unwary, who have no idea of a man writing with an intention to deceive, and who will not believe that the Press is ever so far prostituted, as to become a vehicle of falsehood and misrepresentation. But scanty, as his intellect may be, he saw an inconsistency between the principles of republicanism and those of revelation; and to screen himself from the charge, he openly sacrifices his religious creed at the shrine of his favourite God.

~ Republicanism and Deism, have the most intimate alliance in principle, and have seldom long been separated in practice. Both are founded upon a high, but false idea of the uniformity and perfection of the human character. Republicanism supposes that every man is wise enough to be his own legislator, and that the laws of a free state will
always

always possess energy sufficient to be their own executioners. It supposes the line of natural and moral perfection to be drawn, human attainments in knowledge and in virtue, regularly to extend to the limits it prescribes---none to surpass and none to fall short of the appointed mark---an equality of rights to follow as the consequence---and the excellence of the system to consist in every subject being his own ruler, and every ruler his own subject. Deism implies an universal capacity in man, of discovering the Creator in his works; and from the present arrangements of providence, of inferring the nature and certainty of his future destination. It implies a natural penetration to discover his duty, a natural will and ability to perform it, and a natural power, by means of these services, to render himself acceptable in the sight of God.

It is not wonderful, then, in the history of the world, to find these systems so often conjoined. In modern times the instance of France is recent in our minds. Before the last century produced a class of writers, who assumed the title of œconomists, and whose object it was to propagate the principles of scepticism and political licentiousness, the French were noted for their regard to religion. It was mingled indeed with much superstition; but the superstition was harmless, when compared with that destitution of principle, by which it has been supplanted. A revolution in Church and state,
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was the end which both the *Œconomists* and *Encyclopedists* proposed, and which they laboured to effectuate with an industrious zeal. As their numbers encreased, and their writings circulated, they spread the direful contagion of spiritual innovation and political discontent. Infidelity and contempt for the civil magistrate advanced with equal progression. At length the revolutionary signal was given. The Pillars of the throne were shaken by the dreadful howl of popular fury. A benignant prince calmly suffered the abridgment of his prerogative, and the sceptre which he had swayed in righteousness and mercy, was usurped by a band of lawless banditti, avaricious of plunder, and panting for blood. The Church establishment was the object of their fury, and her revenues were the devoted prey. The sanctity of the temples of God was violated by the sacriligious hands of hired assassins; their treasures were pilfered, their lands were confiscated, and the ministers of religion were forced into exile. Still however there was a King, and therefore the profession of religion was not wholly abandoned. But the spirit of popular faction is restless, and democratical rage is unsatiable. It was not enough to have spoiled their Sovereign of his ancient rights, and to have restricted in every particular the operations of the executive power. The Crown was found to be forfeited, and an abdication of the Throne was proclaimed. But this was not enough, he was hurried from the palace

to the dungeon, and in the cell of a common malefactor, was doomed to drag the load of life. Even this was not enough. The tygers of the republic roared for the blood of their Sovereign. Justice was insulted with the mockery of a trial; the murderous decree was passed; the unresisting Prince was led to the scaffold, and stained with his blood the annals of France. When Christianity witnessed the awful scene, she hung her drooping head, and mourned over the dying protector of her rights. The forebodings which she felt were quickly realized. Her altars are deserted, and her temples are prophaned; her worship is neglected; her sabbaths are obliterated, and Deism is recognized by the Republic, one and indivisible, as its congenial religion.

We have found Mr. Paine's religious creed perfectly consistent with his political opinions, but more than consistency is requisite to give any system a claim upon general reception. It must be weighed in the balance of truth, and tried by the undoubted touch-stone of sound Philosophy.

I shall not follow Mr. Paine in all his eccentric rambles over the field of controversy, but shall endeavour to reduce his arguments into different classes, and answer them in a more systematic arrangement than he has constructed. All his objections are directed either against the authenticity
and

and genuineness of the books of scripture, the testimony of the Apostles as historians of facts, the importance of revelation, or what is called its internal and external evidence; and by treating of those particulars in their order, we shall have an opportunity of examining the principal contents of his pamphlet.

In investigating the claims of any pretended revelation, the historical truth of the facts recorded, must always form the first subject of enquiry. If Jesus and his Apostles never lived; if the prophecies contained in the scriptures never were delivered; or, if the miracles there recorded, never were wrought; or even through carelessness, misfortune, or design, the original text be so mutilated, altered, and corrupted, as not to give a faithful relation of what really happened, it is vain to found their claims to a superior descent upon facts, which may be shewn never to have existed; or if they did exist, are so grossly misrepresented, that they cannot be depended on. Now, says Mr. Paine "How much
 " or what part of the books, called the new Tes-
 " tament, was written by the persons whose names
 " they bear, is what we can know nothing of."---
 Of the Authenticity of the scriptures, we have much greater evidence, than of any equally ancient composition. They are frequently quoted by contemporary historians; enemies as well as friends to christianity, as the writings of the men to whom

they are ascribed. And we know that in different ages of the Church, many spurious epistles, which were brought into circulation by designing men, were rejected with contempt, which affords a strong presumption, that those which compose the canon of scripture, were received with the greatest caution, and only upon the best authority.---But, says Mr. Paine elsewhere, "The Church Mythologists
 " decided by vote, what books should be received
 " as the word of God, and what should not. Had
 " they voted otherwise, all the people since calling
 " themselves christians, would have believed otherwise; for the belief of the one comes from the
 " vote of the other. Who the people were that
 " did all this, we know nothing of; they called
 " themselves by the general name of the Church,
 " and this is all we know of the matter."---When a man allows he is ignorant, he deserves some credit for the confession; and we feel a propensity to give him all the information in our power. But when from his ignorance of facts, he deduces conclusions, which the slightest acquaintance with the circumstances of the case, would have demonstrated to be manifestly false, we triumph over him in the pride of conscious superiority; and instead of pitying his ignorance, are rather inclined to reproach him, with his want of information. If Mr. Paine had known the learning and integrity, of the fathers of the church; if he had reflected on their ample opportunities of information; or, if he
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had been at all conversant with their writings, in which accounts of the spurious Gospels and Epistles, which they rejected, are given; and the reasons of the discriminations which were made are assigned, he would not have betrayed his lack of knowledge, nor incurred the imputations of conceit without learning, and of being arrogant without the aid of documents to substantiate his allegations.

On the genuineness of revelation he remarks---
 " The continually progressive change to which
 " the meaning of words is subject, the want of an
 " universal language which renders translations necessary,
 " the errors to which translations are again
 " subject, the mistakes of copyists and printers,
 " together with the possibility of willful alteration,
 " are of themselves evidence that human language,
 " whether in speech or print, cannot be the vehicle
 " of the word of God."---If Mr. Paine means to lay down this as a general position, it scarcely merits a reply. If a revelation be given by God to any individual, it is surely communicable by him to another, and if communicable, it is as certainly capable of being made traditionary; else language cannot be employed as a vehicle of ideas, nor can writing give an intelligible representation of language. Besides, were there any defect in the common mode of communication, it could easily be remedied by the author of revelation;
 nor

nor would it be more unworthy of the special interposition of Deity to preserve a revelation uncorrupted, after it was delivered, than to deliver it when the circumstances of the case required. But if Mr. Paine intends that the objection is applicable in particular to the books of scripture, it may easily be repelled without having recourse to any supernatural interference. The agreement of the Christian version of the Old Testament with the Jewish, is the strongest evidence possible of the genuineness of both, for their difference of opinion respecting the advent of the Messiah derived from contrary interpretations of prophecy, early produced a mutual jealousy, which would have operated reciprocally in both, had either attempted to alter or corrupt the sacred text. The books of the New Testament were left on written record, and have been regularly handed down thro' an uninterrupted succession of ages. They were early translated into many different languages, and dispersed into various parts of the world; and passages containing the most important doctrines of the Gospel have been quoted in the precise language in which they were delivered, and are still extant in the writings of the enemies of Christianity. This last circumstance taken in conjunction with the universal coincidence of sentiment, and almost exact agreement in expression, which obtains among all the versions of the New Testament, afford a more
satisfying

satisfying proof that the writings have not been materially corrupted or falsified, than if there had been a single copy still remaining, attested by a living witness to be a faithful transcript of the original, which is accounted sufficient evidence to ascertain the right of private property in any court of judicature. That during the revolutions of seventeen centuries, and the vast multiplicity of manuscripts and translations, errors should not have crept into the text, would have been miraculously surprizing. But these are so trivial, that they may be easily rectified by having recourse to original manuscripts, which are still to be found in several places of Europe, by comparing ancient versions, or by chaste criticism and sober conjecture.

But though the authenticity and genuineness of revelation be admitted, in order to compleat the evidence for its historical truth, it will be necessary to enquire whether testimony does not invalidate the truth of revelation, and whether the veracity of the attestators of the Christian revelation is sufficiently respectable to merit the confidence of mankind. Mr. Paine allows the possibility of a revelation, but denies its credibility, except in the case of the person to whom it is first delivered. "Revelation," says he, "when applied to religion, means something communicated immediately by God---No one will deny or dispute the power of the Almighty to
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“ make such communication if he pleases. But ad-
 “ mitting, for the sake of the case, that something
 “ has been revealed to a certain person, and not
 “ revealed to any other person, it is revelation to
 “ that person only. When he tells it to a second
 “ person, a second to a third, a third to a fourth,
 “ and so on, it ceases to be a revelation to all those
 “ persons. It is revelation to the first person only,
 “ and hearsay to every other, and consequently they
 “ are not obliged to believe it. It is a contra-
 “ diction in terms and ideas to call any thing a
 “ revelation that comes to us at second hand, either
 “ verbally or in writing; revelation is necessarily
 “ limited to the first communication. After this it
 “ is only an account of something which that per-
 “ son says was made to him, and though he may find
 “ himself obliged to believe it, it cannot be in-
 “ cumbent on me to believe it in the same manner;
 “ for it was not a revelation made to me, and I
 “ have only his word for it, that it was made to
 “ him.” This statement is replete with the grossest
 misrepresentation, and the most palpable absur-
 dities. According to Mr. Paine, it is vain for any
 person who has received a revelation from God
 to offer evidences of his divine mission, except
 all to whom the revelation is imparted, have a
 particular private revelation to assure them of its
 truth. Such a supposition implies that God, after
 having communicated extraordinary discoveries of
 his will to some individual for the use and in-
 struction

struction of mankind, cannot furnish that individual with such credentials of his mission as are sufficient to justify the world in receiving him as a messenger sent from Heaven. It supposes either that the force of evidence diminishes in proportion to the number of the persons to whom it is directed, or that the same evidence which was considered as sufficient to prove the divinity of a doctrine, is not adequate to support the credit of the preacher of that doctrine. It is readily granted that confident and solemn professions, even when united with the strongest inward persuasion of divine inspiration, can by no means authenticate pretensions that are supported by no further evidence; for it is but reasonable to believe that the righteous governor of the universe, when he commissions persons divinely inspired to instruct mankind in his name, will accompany their mission with such evidences as are sufficient to induce a rational faith in those to whom this revelation is not immediately made, of the high authority on which it rests. But because proper evidence is necessary, it by no means follows that no evidence is equal to the task, and to assert the contrary is the consummation of sceptical dogmatism. When the doctrines delivered are manifestly conducive to promote the glory of God, when their tendency to enlarge the circle of human happiness, and to extend the empire of benevolence and truth stands unrivalled in the

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annals of virtue, when they are attested by such miraculous operations, as evidently argue the aid of supernatural power, and when in further confirmation of a divine commission, the contingent events of futurity, which are for ever inscrutable to human sagacity, are clearly and minutely foretold, there is an aggregate of moral evidence, which to a serious considerer, will be more satisfactory than if God himself were to appear in the splendor of divinity, and to deliver the truths which his messenger had declared. For supposing a revelation to be given immediately from Heaven, without human intervention, it is impossible to conceive it accompanied with evidence at once so rational and so convincing. The latter is calculated to overpower the sense, the former to satisfy the mind.

Mr. Paine adds, in illustration of his argument ---“ When Moses told the Children of Israel that “ he received the two tables of the commandments “ from the hand of God, they were not obliged to “ believe him, because they had no other authority “ for it than his telling them so.” ---Our author is peculiarly unfortunate in the example which he has chosen to confirm his doctrine, and I am confident, that a more accurate acquaintance with the history would have rectified his mistake. As Moses was herding the flocks of his father-in-law, by the mountain of Horeb, the Deity was pleased to

to call him from the occupation of a shepherd, to liberate the descendants of Abraham from Egyptian bondage, and to conduct them to the land which was promised to their fathers. Moses started an objection which would naturally have occurred to every thinking man---“ They will not believe nor “ hearken to my voice, for they will say the Lord “ hath not appeared unto thee.”--Miraculous gifts were immediately conferred, by which he was to demonstrate the credentials of his mission. Invested with these extraordinary powers, the Shepherd of Jethro undertakes the task, assembles the elders of Israel, and having declared the author, proposed the object, and displayed the authority of his legation, he is regularly installed into his office. Whilst he held the reins of executive government, he frequently wrought miracles in their behalf, rescued them from the slavery of their oppressors, and delivered them from the sword of their enemies; he was the medium of their communications with Heaven for many years, and a long experience of his fidelity must have removed every suspicion of imposition from their minds. When the law was delivered from Sinai, they discerned the signs of a present Deity, they were struck with terror, they removed to a distance from the mount, they heard Jehovah conversing with their leader from the midst of the cloud, they said unto Moses, after he had read the law, “ Speak thou with us, and we will hear,

“ but let not God speak with us, lest we die. AM
 “ that the Lord hath spoken, we will do.” And yet,
 Mr. Paine can assert, that they were not obliged
 to believe him, because they had no other voucher
 for the truth of his mission than his bare ipse dixit;
 and proceeds in the same tone of unqualified
 impudence to compare the authority of the law
 with that of the Koran. Pursuing this chain of
 objection, he next endeavours to expose the ex-
 traordinary conception of Jesus Christ, as ludicrous
 and absurd: but the answer to this objection has
 been partly anticipated, and will be partly in-
 cluded in my remarks upon miracles.

We have found then, that revelation is capable
 of being communicated, and that when proper
 testimony is given, communication does not in-
 validate its truth: it now remains to be enquired, if
 the attestations of the christian revelation, are suffi-
 ciently respectable to merit confidence. Our au-
 thor objects that “ Jesus Christ wrote no account
 “ of himself, of his birth, parentage, or any thing
 “ else; that not a line of the New Testament is of
 “ his own writing, that had it been the object or
 “ design of Jesus Christ, to establish a new religion,
 “ he would undoubtedly have written the system him-
 “ self, or procured it to be written in his own life
 “ time, that in several instances, the writers relate
 “ the same event differently, and that from this dis-
 “ agreement, revelation is necessarily out of the ques-
 “ tion,

“tion, with respect to those books.”---Mr. Paine, in my opinion, could not have started any set of questions, more unfriendly to his cause. Had Jesus been the historian of his own life, and had he recorded the acts of his own ministry, the history would have been traduced as a tale of legendary romance, and the records been ranked among the annals of fiction. The marvellous works which he performed, would have been considered as deriving their lustre from the recital of the author, the brilliant assemblage of virtues which adorned his character, would have been ascribed to the vanity of self conceit, and the accusation that he being a man made himself God, could never have been repelled by the respectable witness of collateral testimony. On the other hand, who could be better qualified from their knowledge, for giving an accurate narrative of the life and transactions of Jesus of Nazareth, than those, who had been his constant, and intimate companions, from the time that he commenced his public ministry, to the hour that he expired on Calvary, and who were also the witnesses of his resurrection, and ascension? or who could be better secured by their situation, from falsifying the account of his religion, or exaggerating the merit of his author, than those who were threatened with every evil, for publishing the truth, who would have been punished with death in the cruelest form, for the smallest breach of veracity in favour of him, whose history they wrote; and

and who at the same time, had fortitude enough to brave the danger, and to scorn that safety, which was purchased by the arts of concealment? The Apostles could neither be deceived themselves, nor could they have any motive for deceiving others. Had they recorded events, which happened in distant lands, or narrated the history of a person, who lived several ages before the time at which they wrote, they might have incurred suspicion; but if they had the exercise of their senses, they could not be mistaken, in what they daily heard taught, and saw performed. We can easily conceive, that an individual of a weak understanding, and under the influence of a distempered fancy, might have been once or twice imposed upon, by a dextrous deception of an experienced impostor. But to suppose twelve men, all of whom seem to have possessed a rational and just discernment, so grossly deluded respecting matters, into which they had so often an opportunity of examining, and deceived by the false reports of their senses, in so many instances, which lay open to the perception of all, is a phenomenon which stands unparalleled in the history of the human mind. All the books of the New Testament, were not indeed written by the Apostles, but those which they did not write, they revised and corrected, before they were given to the public. And this I will undertake to prove, from the respectable testimonies of Irinæus, Eusebius and Tertullian.

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As the sacred writers could not be deceived themselves, so neither have we any reason to suppose that they had an intention of deceiving others. Their characters are altogether the most remote from that of impostors. Their writings contain no air of fiction, no marks of artifice or design. The narration is accompanied with an unaffected detail of circumstances, which, if they were not true, would only have served to give their enemies ample ground for detecting their fallacy. The difference in their modes of relating the same facts (for inconsistencies or contradictions there are none) which Mr. Paine vauntingly considers as a death blow to their veracity, is one of the strongest vouchers of their honour. Had they all selected the same circumstances, adopted the same arrangement, and employed the same expressions, they might have been justly charged with collusion, and with having formed a conspiracy to deceive. Interspersed neither with empty declamation, nor forced description, their style possesses no other ornaments, but those of plainness and perspicuity. Nor is their own history embellished with any unusual display of character. They freely confess their faults, and for their misconduct, they shew no anxiety to frame any apology. They readily own the meanness of their original employments, and the penurious circumstances of their master, they strive not to conceal. The cause in which they embarked

embarked exposed them to poverty and persecution, to ignominy and reproach, but none of them could ever be inticed by promises of preferment, or intimidated by the prospect of death, in its most horrible forms, to forsake their companions, and discover the imposture. Judas, indeed, betrayed his master, but he repented it in the bitterness of his soul. But though in this world they had no temporal advantages to expect, but on the contrary, every species of misery to fear, if they were convinced of the truth of the doctrines which they taught, the hopes of future bliss, which their religion inspired, might banish from their view the prospect of present calamity. If, however, they were deceivers, their conduct is perfectly unexplicable on any principle of human action. For their consciences must frequently have discovered to their guilty souls, those latent horrors which in the coming world, await the destroyers of the happiness of mankind, and in the feeling of present infamy, and the anticipation of future woe, they would have sunk under a load of despair. It is impossible to conceive how they could have remained insensible to such impressions, except by supposing them abandoned to every principle of virtue. Yet we have no reason to justify our forming such a harsh conclusion; for suitable to the religion which they professed, was their conduct in private life. Peaceable and inoffensive, strangers to the pleasures of the world,

world, and unconcerned about the affairs of a present life, they were ambitious only to promote the glory of God, by extending the reign of happiness among men. Nor did their courage forsake them in the hour of dissolution; with joy they sacrificed their lives, as a testimony to the truth of their doctrine, and died with cheerfulness in the cause of that master whom they had served.

But we are not even left to gather the truth of their testimony from this collateral, though unequivocal evidence. They not only attested that their master was endowed with the power of working miracles, they avowed that he had conferred upon them the same supernatural gift, which they did not scruple to display in public, and in the presence of their enemies. They not only recorded the predictions of him who was immediately sent from Heaven. They prophesied in his name, and foretold the future state of the church, with as much accuracy, as if they had been the historians of after ages.---By this induction, derived not from varying probabilities, or principles capriciously assumed, but resting on the sure and unalterable basis of fact, the historical truth of the books of the New Testament is carried to a higher point, on the scale of moral evidence, than any other history ever was; a point which can

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only

only be surpassed by the evidence for the divine original of the Scriptures.

But before we enter upon the evidence for the divinity of the Scriptures, there is a previous question which naturally occurs, respecting the necessity, or rather the importance, of revelation: for it is not to be supposed that God, who does nothing in vain, would deliver any communications of his will, which were already known, or might be easily discovered. Whereas on the other hand, if such communications were of the last importance to the virtue and happiness of his reasonable creatures, and if the utmost energies of the human mind, were inadequate to their discovery, it may be presumed, (and a presumption it can only be) that the benevolent parent of mankind would take pity upon the ignorance and weakness of his children, and vouchsafe those instructions and consolations which their situation required.---“ The word of God,” says Mr. Paine, “ is the creation we behold, and it is in
 “ this word, which no human invention can coun-
 “ terfeit, or alter, that God speaketh universally to
 “ man. It preacheth to all nations, and to all
 “ worlds; and this word of God reveals to man
 “ all that it is necessary for man to know. Let
 “ him believe this with the force it is impossible
 “ to repel, if he permits his reason to act, and
 “ his

“ his rule of moral life will follow of course.”---
 But though in the works of creation, the power of
 Godhead may be clearly traced, though their line
 be gone into all the world, and their words unto
 the end of the world, yet their language was little
 attended to, and when attended to, was little
 understood.

It is not fair to employ revelation as an inter-
 preter of natural religion, and then to boast of
 the interpretation as a child of human inven-
 tion. Mr. Paine, and most of the modern Deists,
 have first availed themselves of the discoveries of
 scripture, and then have ungenerously converted
 them into weapons of hostility against the religion
 from which they borrowed them. Who were the
 sages of antiquity, and those luminaries of science
 who irradiated the ancient literary horizon! they
 seem but sickly tapers when compared with the
 flambeaux of modern philosophy. But let Mr.
 Paine, and his adherents, abate their pride of
 discovery till they have ascertained to the world,
 that the lustre with which they shine is not the
 reflection of borrowed rays. In the golden ages
 of antiquity, the human mind was as vigorous,
 and its faculties were, perhaps, more highly im-
 proved, than in later times. Yet philosophy
 could boast of none of those sublime discoveries
 which the sons of natural religion now so proudly
 impose upon the world, as the offspring of their

unassisted reason. In order impartially to judge of her powers, let us recur to the history of natural religion previous to the commencement of the Christian æra, and from the writings of her disciples, deduce those conclusions which a knowledge of facts can best warrant us to draw. There we find their notions of Deity to have been vague, confused, and contradictory. The number cannot be precisely ascertained, but a multiplicity of Gods formed an article of general faith. Twelve principal Deities presided over the higher departments of the universe, and controlled the laws of nature. Whatever was formed to dazzle or delight, announced to their fancy a protecting God. Nature was peopled with hosts of invisible spirits. The *Æriads* of the mountains, the *Dryads* of the woods, the *Naiads* of the springs, and the *Tritons* of the sea, filled up the lower orders of the celestial hierarchy. Of their nature and occupations, the history is gross and degrading. They were subject to the passions, and liable to the wants that are incident to man. They repaired their strength with nectar and ambrosia, and regaled their senses with the steam of sacrifice, and the odours of frankincense.

Indeterminate ideas of duty, and a general dissolution of manners was the inevitable effect of such a creed. As their Mythology was replete with the impurities of their Gods, the worshippers
naturally

naturally thought to appease them with the incense of vice, and in sacrificing to their Deities, they ministered at the altar of their own lusts. A few, whom the refinements of habit, and of sentiment, had raised above the herd of vulgar enquirers, betook themselves to philosophic research, and composed institutes of virtue, which bordered on the two extremes of laxness and austerity. At one time they deviated into a course, in which undefiled religion prohibits her followers to walk; at another they forced a path through every natural barrier into regions which true virtue will ever disclaim as her abode. Now they degraded man, beneath the dignity of his nature, by inspiring him with the love of groveling pursuits, and illicit gratification, and now they exalted him to a rank, which he never was intended to hold, and made him talk of virtue like an angel, when he should have been content with practising it, with the imperfection of a man. Such was natural religion, as it was modelled in the philosophical systems of Epicurus, and of Zeno. The former by representing virtue as subservient to enjoyment, broke down every fence of morality, and destroyed the eternal distinctions between right and wrong, the latter considering virtue, as constituting all that is desirable, and deeming the happiness of the good man, independent of misfortune and calamity, forgot that they were framing a system for men; a system, which every one would relinquish,

as soon as he was visited with sickness or disaster. The disciples of the one, were slaves to the world from principle; the followers of the other, were reduced to its subjection, by a system of morals which discouraged every virtuous effort, which did not attain to absolute perfection.

Natural religion, was also defective in the motives to obedience, which she proposed to her disciples. It requires but a very superficial acquaintance with prophane history, to discover that the immortality of the soul, under the light of nature, was very darkly understood, and very partially credited. There might indeed be a vulgar prejudice in its favour, but it was grounded on no satisfactory arguments. Even the minds which were most enlightened with science, could not penetrate the gloom, which obscured the confines of the grave. Still the celestial spirit looked upward, and pointed to its own abode; but still, dissolving nature shook its purpose, and made it claim kindred with the dust.---Small is the sum of that felicity, which the most sanguine child of nature, expects to be elevated. The savage of the north, rejoices in the hope of being admitted to the hall of Odin, where he shall enjoy the society of his fathers, where he shall meet the dog, who had formerly tended him in his cares, where he shall find his bow, and the former weapons of his defence, where he shall begin the chase, with renewed vigour, and quaff the nectar
of

of the Gods from the skull of his enemy. The inhabitant of a more sultry clime, stretches his imagination beyond the hills, and amidst verdant plains, shady woods, and running waters, paints to his fancy the scene of his future felicity. And what was the elysium of more enlightened times, but a fancied portrait of those beauties, with which the senses are here most enraptured. There the vale of Tempe, and the groves of Ida, mingled their music and their odours; there also were Gardens, fairer than those of Hisperia, watered with a thousand streams, and enlivened with all the beauties of Olympus; there an eternal spring time held the sceptre of the year; there the saints wantonly gambled in the fields, or reclining on the banks of a river, were lulled asleep by the notes of music, which issued from the grove. Descriptions such as these, instead of encouraging habits of virtuous self denial, had an obvious tendency, to rouse every irregular desire, and to sanction every illicit gratification. They had the most direct influence in forming that very character, which it was their avowed purpose to counteract.

But more than a rule of life, and motives to obedience, even supposing them to have been clearly, and perfectly revealed, is necessary to man in his present state. Do this and live, is a covenant, which was adapted to his situation in the happier æra of his history. His moral constitution has
undergone

undergone a melancholy change, and he is not unconscious of his own degeneracy. But the religion of nature speaks the same language, now that she spoke in paradise, that the favour of God, can only be preserved by patient continuance in well doing, and that the slightest violation of the laws of virtue, implies a forfeiture of immortality. To such a language the disciple of nature might well reply. It is in vain that my duty is accurately prescribed, it is in vain that futurity opens her prospects to my view---for I have sinned. Is there any resource still remaining? I would repent, but repentance, is not in my power, and though it were, what assurance can I have of its being accepted. Future obedience, which was no more than my duty, before I violated the laws of my maker, can make no attonement to his justice, for the violation. Besides, what avails it for me to repent to day, when, before tomorrow, I shall commit the same, or a similar transgression. There is an obscurity, and defect, then, in natural religion, which can only be supplied by an extraordinary revelation, containing a republication of the law of nature, and provision for the present state of moral evil.

The communication of a second revelation, is no reflection upon the character of the first, since its unsuitableness to the present state of man, arose not from its imperfection, but from a change in his original situation. But though its constitution may vary

vary, to suit the existing situation of man, and though the plan may be changed, in consequence of a revolution in the human character, it is impossible that any posterior revelation which God may be pleased to deliver, can contradict or be inconsistent with the general nature or any article of a former revelation, since the word of God is eternally immutable, and for ever independent of the will or conduct of his creatures. If Mr. Paine, therefore, can shew that revelation is inconsistent with the pure and uncorrupted principles of natural religion, I will cheerfully give up the question, and join with him in opinion.

Before our author begins particularly to confront the two systems, by way of introduction, he endeavours to shew that Christianity produced a revolution in learning and theology, with a view to overturn the empire of science which natural religion had raised, and which would have proved an effectual bar to its propagation.---In the first place, the principle, that it was the object of christianity to impose upon the ignorance of man, is evidently false. Had Jesus appeared in some remote corner of the world before the invention of letters, or during the darkness of the middle ages, when learning was fallen into disrepute, and when their scanty acquisitions in knowledge were conveyed in meagre chronicles, or wrapt up in fabulous legends, there might be some foundation for

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such a reflection: But when, on the contrary, he chose the most populous and the most civilized country at that time in the world, as the theatre of his public life, when he came in the fullness of the time of science and of learning, and challenged the scrutiny of a most enlightened philosophy, what reason is there to suppose, that he wished to shelter his religion under the shade of the ignorance of the times? That christianity produced a revolution in theology, is true, though not in the sense of Mr. Paine. He seems all along to suppose, that natural religion existed, at the coming of Christ, in its primitive purity; whereas we have shewn, that, long before, it had undergone the most fatal corruptions. Christianity did not withdraw the minds of men from the pursuit of science, which he considers as the parent of true religion, as well as of the arts, but it called them from the profession of idolatry, and from the worship of false deities, to the obedience of the one true God. It did not require them to abandon philosophical research, and to desist from the pursuit of literature, but to reform their creeds, and to amend their lives. The revolution in learning which followed in subsequent ages, was not the effect of the establishment of Christianity, but the consequence of the fall of the Roman Empire, and its subjection by the barbarous swarms of the north. Indeed, though Christianity had induced such a revolution in learning as Mr. Paine supposes to have happened, it would
not

not be relevant to his purpose. He considers it only to have been a desertion of science in favour of literature, the tendency of which to strengthen the judgment, and to correct the taste, is known by every lover of classical erudition. By such a change, Christianity, if indebted to ignorance for its support, would rather have lost than gained. But, unluckily, Mr. Paine has been accustomed to consider these hallowed treasures of genius as the rubbish of antiquity, collected by the pedantry of school-men; and in this case, as well as in many others, speaks evil of what he does not understand.

Having wiped off these introductory aspersions, let us consider, for a little, if there be any thing in the peculiar character of revelation which could have made it an object for its author to attempt obliterating the discoveries of reason, or, as our author chooses to term it, of natural religion.--“What
 “ is called the Christian system,” says Mr. Paine,
 “ including in it the whimsical account of creation,
 “ the amphibious idea of a Man God, the corpo-
 “ real idea of the death of God, &c. are all irre-
 “ conciliable not only to the divine gift of rea-
 “ son, that God hath given to man, but to the
 “ knowledge that man gains of the power and
 “ wisdom of God, by the aid of the sciences,
 “ and by studying the structure of the universe
 “ that God has made.”---If Mr. Paine means,
 by irreconcilable, what cannot be discovered by

the mind of man in a state of nature, or what is above our reason fully to understand, I readily grant, that many of the doctrines of revelation, lye far beyond the capacity of the most vigorous faculties of the human mind. It was the chief intention of revelation, to supply the defects of natural religion. If it had revealed nothing new, it would have answered only half the purpose for which it was given. If its doctrines had been all level to human discovery, it would not have merited the character of an extraordinary revelation. Besides, it was not intended that the human mind should exercise its powers in investigating the reasons either of natural or moral phenomena, or in accounting for the manner of their existence. To ascertain the evidence of facts, to arrive at a knowledge of their properties, and to trace the connections of cause and effect, is the sphere in which reason was destined to operate. But if he means that these doctrines are contradictory to the pure, uncorrupted principles of natural religion, or that they are inconsistent with the dictates of sound reason, let him advance his proofs, and I shall not scruple to hazard a reply. In support of his allegation, our author records an anecdote of himself when a child, which, with an air of exultation, he erects as an infallible standard of truth. When about six or seven years of age, he heard a sermon read, upon Redemption by the death of the Son of God. After hearing the sermon with attention, as is usual for a child

of

of those years, he retired to the garden, to spend some time in meditation upon the subject of the discourse. He revolted at the recollection of what he had heard: he thought that "it was representing the Almighty as a passionate man, who had killed his son when he could not find another object upon which to wreak his fury--- that God was surely too good to do such an action, and too wise to be under the necessity of doing it." When Mr. Paine was a child, he thought as a child, and I could easily excuse his puerilities; but I am sorry to find that the weakness of the boy is not yet supplanted by the judgment of the man. It is impossible to avoid being surprised, when he adds---"that he believes in the same man at this moment; and moreover, that a system of religion which has any thing in it which shocks the mind of a child, cannot be a true system." ---That a child, whose heart is corrupted, whose judgment is weak, whose comprehension is limited, and who, without reflection, gives way to the impulsive feeling of the moment, should possess the most accurate discernment of truth, is a paradox which admits not of confutation. The infant feelings of the mind, however, are not more delusive than the decisions of maturer years, when the understanding is biased by prejudice, or misled by passion. In the instance of our author, the experience of age has only tended to confirm the frivolities of youth, and the opinions which were embraced.

embraced without proof, are retained without reason. After dilating at considerable length upon the sublime discoveries of modern philosophy, and travelling through the immeasurable fields of æther in quest of worlds unnumbered, the magnificent survey, instead of inspiring him with lofty conceptions of the immensity of God, contracts his ideas of the divine attributes; and, in the imbecility of presumption, he demands---“ From
 “ whence could arise the solitary and strange conceit, that the Almighty, who had millions of
 “ worlds equally dependant on his protection,
 “ should quit the care of all the rest, and come
 “ to die in our world?”---But what idea can a finite mind form of infinite capacity? or who is Mr. Paine, that he should scan the perfections of the Almighty, and circumscribe the limits of his power? Nothing but absolute impossibility can control the operations of Omnipotence: and none of the abettors of Deism have been able to shew, that it implies any contradiction to suppose a distinction of persons in the Godhead, while at the same time the nature of Deity remains one and indivisible, or an union of the divine and human natures, without the perfections of Deity being impaired. I pretend not to account for the fact, or to explain the mode of its existence. It is sufficient to have shewn its possibility, since, if it implies no contradiction, the universe may have been governed by the laws of Omnipotence,
 while

while the eternal Son of God was offering himself a sacrifice for the sins of the world; and thus Mr. Paine's objection, that this doctrine is inconsistent with the structure of the universe, falls to the ground.

Our author next confronts Moses's account of the creation with the sublime system of a plurality of worlds, and endeavours to shew, that "the two beliefs cannot be held together in the same mind."---This argument is as inconclusive as the former. Moses never pretended to be an astronomer, nor was it his object to reveal a system of natural philosophy. Had the principles of science been revealed from Heaven, the source of discovery, from which proceed the noblest enjoyments of which the human mind is susceptible, would have been forever shut up: the powers of the understanding would have lain dormant for want of exercise; and in the stupor of mental insensibility, the philosopher would have passed his days in listless indolence and inactive repose. He gave such a history of creation, as, I believe, has never been rivalled in sublimity of composition, as was level to the capacity of the most vulgar understanding, and as was calculated to impress mankind with those sentiments of piety which naturally flow from faith in God as the creator of the universe. On what points the discordance rests, I should have been glad to be informed; but Mr.

Paine

Paine keeps no Bible ; and I am apt to suspect, that, through the medium of a disordered fancy, he frequently discerns flaws in the Scriptures which exist only in his own distempered brain.

Our author has wisely declined pursuing his argument of inconsistency through a greater variety of points ; but in another part of his pamphlet, he animadverts with considerable severity, both upon the general character of revelation, and many of its particular doctrines. As his objections relate to the internal evidence of revelation, they fall now to be examined.---“ Revelation,” says he, “ is a communication of something which the
 “ person to whom that thing is revealed did not
 “ know before. For if I have done a thing, or
 “ seen it done, it needs no revelation to tell me
 “ I have done it, or seen it, nor to enable me to
 “ tell it, or to write it. Revelation, therefore,
 “ cannot be applied to any thing on earth, of
 “ which man is himself the actor, or the witness ;
 “ and consequently all the historical and anecdotal
 “ part of the Bible, which is almost the whole of
 “ it, is not within the meaning or compass of the
 “ word revelation, and therefore is not the word
 “ of God.” Does Mr. Paine mean to say, that every new information which we receive, merits the title of a revelation ? Then his definition is an extraordinary revelation to me ; for I never heard it given before. Or, does he mean that novelty

velty constitutes an essential requisite in the character of a revelation. His words are of dubious interpretation; but if this be his meaning, I perfectly agree with him; yet I by no means recognize the conclusion which he draws from his exposition of the term. It is one of the peculiar excellencies of the scriptures, that the morality which they teach is not delivered in dry didactic lessons, but that it is beautifully intermingled with an historical narration of facts, calculated at once to strike, and to interest the mind. Revelation was not given for the sake of transmitting the facts, but the facts were recorded for the sake of the moral instructions, which they tend to convey. The story of Sampson, which our author quotes in order to ridicule, was not written for the purpose of informing Sampson of what he himself had atchieved, nor for the purpose of adding to the stock of our historical knowledge, but for our instruction in the principles of morality, and for our improvement in virtuous attainments. In the historical passages of scripture, the moral is sometimes interwoven with the texture of the narration; at other times it is subjoined by way of inference; and in a few instances we are left to deduce it from the consequences which accrued to the actors.

But Mr. Paine, in his usual spirit of contradiction, denies the moral tendency of the scriptures,

tures, and pours forth a torrent of abuse which could only flow from a mind which ignorance or weakness had betrayed into the bitterness of reproach, and the coarseness of invective.---“ When-
 “ ever we read the obscene stories, the volup-
 “ tuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous
 “ executions, the unrelenting victiveness with
 “ which more than half the bible is filled, it would
 “ be more consistent that we called it the work
 “ of a Demon, than the word of God. It is a
 “ history of wickedness, which hath served to
 “ corrupt and brutalize mankind, and for my own
 “ part, I sincerely detest it as I detest every thing
 “ that is cruel.”---Such language ill becomes the
 valiant assertor of the privileges of reason. De-
 clamation without argument, assertion without
 proof, and violent censure without dignity or mo-
 deration, characterize the blusterer. The advocate
 of truth despises having recourse to such con-
 temptible substitutions. It is the object of reve-
 lation not to disguise the manners of men, or to
 make them appear different from what they really
 are, but to give an accurate description of the hu-
 man heart, and a faithful picture of human life, as
 they display themselves in all the varieties of cha-
 racter, and all the diversities of situation. But
 where do we find in the scriptures, virtue suffer-
 ing the penalty of vice, or vice arrayed in those
 laurels which grow only for the virtuous? The
 crimes of individuals, and the corruption of states,
 never

never escape either the infliction of an immediate punishment, or a threatening of approaching calamity. Private integrity and public justice are not allowed to pass without a present reward, or the promise of a future recompense. Those decrees which may seem severe, and those judgments, which to a superficial thinker, may wear the aspect of cruelty, were justified by the nature of that dispensation in which they obtained. It was the prime object of the Jewish œconomy to preserve the principles of the true religion uncorrupted, amid the extended conquests of Heathenism, and the idolatrous fictions of a false theology. To ensure the success of this design, the family of Abraham was selected from among the nations, to be the repository of the sacred oracles, and to convey them to posterity in their original purity. In compliance with the prejudices of the times, and the wayward dispositions of the Jews, recourse was had to temporal retributions, that by the awful judgments which were inflicted upon them for every deviation from the faith and worship of the one true God, and by the severe punishments which they were chosen to be the instruments of executing upon their idolatrous neighbours, they might be deterred from every species of innovation in matters where their religion was concerned. In these retributions there was a motive to constancy in faith and worship so often occurring, and so strongly addressed to their feelings,

ings, and their interests, that it was scarcely possible to evade its force. For such is the predominance of the sensitive over the rational powers of man, that the present effects of actions are often duly considered, when their future consequences would be entirely overlooked, though, perhaps, the consequences would ultimately be of more serious moment than the effects. Upon characters of a soft and pliable texture, impressions when frequently repeated require a slighter stamp, but upon the stubborn and rebellious spirit of the Jews, they behoved to be deep, in order to be lasting. Accordingly the punishments of idolatry were decreed with a severity, and executed with a rigour which may be considered as a variation from the usual tenor of God's moral government, but which were fully justified by the exigences and importance of the case in which they were employed. If a greater share of calamity was appointed to some individuals, and some communities than in the common course of things falls to the lot even of the profligate, we may rest assured that at the final day of retribution, the peculiarities of their situation will not escape the notice of the righteous judge of all, and that this and every other seeming irregularity will finally be made to harmonize with the laws of equity, and the usual mode of the divine procedure.

To the miscellaneous parts of scripture, and particularly to the anonymous publications, our author is willing to allow some merit, but the prophets he decries, as a band of straggling poets and itinerant preachers. He enters into a particular discussion of the meaning of the word by which they are denominated, and from an attempt to shew that they were only poets, and not predictors of future events, he assumes the merit of having compleatly overturned "the inferences that have been drawn from their writings, the devotional respect that is paid them, and the laboured commentaries that have been written upon them;" and this arduous enterprize is accomplished neither by the subtleties of reason, nor the refinements of scepticism, but by a base quibble upon a word, which vanishes before the evidence of fact like the apparition of the night at the dawn of the morning sun. If their writings were not still extant, if the events which corresponded with their predictions were not still on record, or if we had no opportunity of comparing the one with the other, Mr. Paine might have swindled us out of an argument for the truth of our faith. But when we know that the prophecies are written not in the style of histories of the past, but precisely in that mode of expression which it is natural to use in foretelling the events of futurity, and when we know that after the lapse of several ages, events occurred which exactly corresponded

corresponded with what the prophets had declared would come to pass, it is vain to say that the prophets were only poets, because the coincidence between the events and their declarations is unaccountable upon any other supposition than that of considering them as prophets in the common acceptation of the term. I grant that their predictions may have been delivered in poetical strains. Authors of considerable celebrity, have shewn, that there is good reason to believe that they were. Nor will I deny, that prophesying in some passages of scripture, means no more than performing upon instruments of music. In the first stages of language, the representations of thought are exceedingly defective, and the same word is frequently employed as the sign of different ideas. But it is very unfair, from particular applications of a word, which the poverty of language may require, to judge of its original and common acceptation. Mr. Paine must know if he had the ingenuity to confess it, that in a great proportion of the multiplicity of passages in scripture, in which prophet and prophecy occur, they are employed to denote a predictor, and prediction of future events. And for him to have recourse to a rare and unusual interpretation of a single word, in order to invalidate the force of an argument, the truth of which depends not upon words but upon facts, may be considered as his last and weakest effort, to support an expiring cause.

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From the Old, our author proceeds to the New Testament, the title of which he takes occasion to ridicule, as implying a second will of the Creator. The ignorance of Mr. Paine really offers more occasions of triumph, than the generosity, or the pride of his adversaries, will permit them to accept. The instance before me, I resign to the school-boy to expose, for were I formally to explain *διαθηνή*, and with an ostentatious display of classical erudition, to demonstrate that a covenant and not a testament, is its proper signification; I should be suspected of being needlessly fond of parade in detecting an error, which every learner of a Greek vocabulary, would easily have discovered.

From the title our Author passes to the contents of this sacred volume. The gospel he objects to as only "giving detached anecdotes, and not a regular " history of the life of Jesus Christ." The plan on which they are written certainly affords less ground for suspecting any collusion among the Evangelists, than if each of the Gospels had contained distinct and regular histories of his life; and in their present form, we have all the information we could desire, respecting the conduct and character of the Saviour simply communicated, and pleasingly diversified. The incidents of his early life, which were of less concern to mankind, are slightly narrated, while the great objects of his mission, and the acts of his public ministry, which are
matters

matters of more general moment, are fully detailed. Nothing which was of importance for us to know, is concealed. Nothing which was of indifferent concern, is divulged.

The obscurity of our Saviour is next absurdly made the foundation for a reflection upon his divinity. Had the author of Christianity come down from Heaven arrayed in all the pomp of majesty, or had he made his first appearance upon the imperial throne, and chosen the princes of the earth for his apostles, might it not have been justly said, that he wished to deceive mankind with false appearances of greatness, and that his religion, like that of the Koran, was propagated not by its own intrinsic excellence, but by the influence of its author, operating upon the interests and passions of men?

His death, instead of being unexpected or unintentional, as Mr. Paine has thought fit to allege, he minutely foretold, and voluntarily submitted to, when he might easily have escaped from the reach of his enemies, and defeated their purpose of wrath. His conduct toward the conclusion of his days, far from betraying symptoms of cowardice, exhibited a picture of heroism, equally remote from unfeeling indifference and dishonest pusillanimity. Oppressed by the anguish of his sufferings, he was exceeding sorrowful, but he

he did not shrink from the bitterest dregs of that cup of bitterness which his enemies had mingled. He mourned the dereliction of divine consolation, but he bowed not his head till he said, it is finished.

But what was the purpose (our adversary exclaims) of all this scene of suffering? If man transgress the laws of his maker, God is merciful to forgive. He is not an angry tyrant, inflexible to the penitential tears of his offending creatures. He delighteth not in blood, nor would he demand the life of his only Son, as the price of his returning favour. If a sacrifice was necessary, the guilty behoved to suffer for their sin, for God is not unjust, that he should inflict the punishment of transgression upon him who knew no guile. The idea of substituting the innocent for the guilty, is discordant with the eternal principles of moral justice, and could never be admitted into the counsels of a being who is righteous in all his ways, and who is almighty to pardon. But even supposing for a moment, injustice and cruelty to have so far obtained in the government of God, as to render the death of his only Son necessary to the expiation of iniquity, would it not have been enough for him to have paid the ordinary debt of nature, without submitting to the persecutions of the unworthy, and the sufferings of a felon? These are not Mr. Paine's own words,

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but they are the precise sentiments which he means to convey, expressed in terms less offensive than he has employed. The objections which have been started against the nature and necessity of the atonement, are generally suggested by erroneous sentiments that are formed of the nature of sin, and the character of God. Sin is commonly considered, by the enemies of this doctrine, merely as an insult against the majesty of Heaven, which the Almighty Sovereign of the universe, whose honour is eternally independent of the reproach of man, might easily have overlooked; or as a debt contracted, which the parent of good might have cancelled; or as an intrinsic evil which the father of mercies might have forgiven. But these are inadequate ideas of the divine character, and incomplete notions of moral turpitude. We are instructed to view the Almighty as a lawgiver, who exercises a moral government, obedience to the laws of which constitutes the happiness of reasonable creatures. Sin is the transgression of the law: suffering the desert of guilt; and punishment, the suffering in consequence of this desert. The punishment then was due to the law, and the lawgiver in consequence of the capacity in which he acted, was bound to inflict it. It is presumptuous to appeal to the mercy of the lawgiver from the just demands of the law, because that would be supposing an inconsistency of character, and a separation of interests, which never can exist. The law

law of God is the eternal rule of right, which he himself hath established, and by which his moral character is unchangeably regulated. To reflect upon the severity of the law, is to impeach the justice of the lawgiver, and to expect that God will abate the demands of his law, or grant a free remission, when it requires compleat satisfaction, implies that he may vary the standard of his perfections, pronounce to be wrong what he had formerly established to be right, and by the exercise of his mercy, disannul every claim which his justice may prefer. The demands of the law then behoved to be satisfied.

Satisfaction is a method of fulfilling an obligation, which may be admitted, or refused as the lawgiver may think fit to determine. 'It's acceptance entirely depends upon the good-will of the lawgiver. The divine lawgiver was pleased to give the strongest testimony of his good-will to men, by devising a plan which offered satisfaction to the law, and which extended pardon and remission to the guilty; and as it was a plan of divine discovery, we may be assured that it was fully competent to all the purposes for which it was designed, because none could be a better judge of the spirit of the law than its author, and none would be more cautious in accepting of satisfaction for a violation of the law, than he whose honour depended upon its being sacredly observed. Death

was the punishment which the law annexed to transgression. Sacrifices of animals had, from a very early period, constituted a part of the religious ritual, both of the Jewish and Heathen nations. They were generally considered either as offerings of gratitude, or as testimonies of their sense of the demerit of sin, or as professions of their faith in the placability of God; but in certain cases there was also considered to be a substitution of the victim for the offerer, of the innocent for the guilty, and were parts of a constitution which admitted of a relaxation of the threatened punishment. As a remedy for moral evil, however they were totally inadequate. The oxen of a thousand hills, and ten thousands of rivers of oil could not atone for the breach of one commandments in the law. Even though the whole rational creation had offered themselves in sacrifice to God for the redemption of one of their number, it could not have been accepted. Every individual hath sinned, and the law hath declared that he that sinneth must die. For human guilt, human suffering was necessary, and to redeem from the curse of the law, innocence was required as the ransom.

Satisfaction by vicarious punishments, is apt to strike us as being unjust in every case, because it is not recognized as valid in human courts of judicature. The reasons of rejecting it in human judgments are manifestly founded upon the imperfect

perfect knowledge of the lawgiver, and upon a fundamental law of nature, that man has no right to dispose of his own life. Society might often be deprived of its most valuable members, while the worthless were spared only to repeat their crimes. Besides, it is one of the first principles of our nature that we ought to take every possible method to preserve and prolong our existence, whereas such a toleration would give every discontented man an opportunity of making an honourable escape from the world, and would present a temptation to save an unfortunate friend, too strong, perhaps, for the generous heart at all times to resist. When applied to the substitution of Christ, these objections are altogether irrelevant. If the evils and sufferings which men incurred by their crimes had been imposed upon him by an act of arbitrary authority, against his will, or even without his consent, it would have been a gross infringement of every rule, both of justice and of goodness. But since he voluntarily undertook the task, since he had power both to lay down his life and to re-assume it when he pleased, and since the world, so far from being a loser, is in consequence of his sufferings unto death, daily receiving fresh communications of his love and delightful anticipations of that salvation, which as a prince and a saviour he is exalted to bestow, where is the cruelty, the injustice, or the absurdity of his vicarious sufferings?

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The manner of his death was the most proper that could have been chosen for two reasons: It was a strong evidence of the truth of his mission, and it was a public proof to his enemies, that no fraud was practised with a view to feign a resurrection so far as its evidence depended upon the reality of his death.

In fine the whole objection is of much more serious significancy to the Deist than the Christian, and may be retorted against Mr. Paine to its utmost extent. He allows the author of Christianity to have been an innocent and a good man, amiable in his manners and benevolent in his intentions. He supposes that poverty waited on his birth, that the arm of persecution accompanied him through the world, and that he terminated his career of virtue and of misery upon a cross in the ignominious society of two common malefactors. Now, if Mr. Paine, without having recourse to any extraordinary design of Providence, can reconcile the connections of innocence and misery, a spirit of benevolence and a rod of oppression, a life of virtue and a violent death, with the administration of a righteous God, such a conjunction is surely much more accountable when viewed through the effects which we deduce from it---forgiveness of sin, restoration to the divine favour, and a communication of the hopes of immortality. If the difficulty be of arduous solution
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to the Christian, to the Deist it must be mysterious beyond conception.

Toward the conclusion of his pamphlet Mr. Paine has thought proper to take offence at the mysteries of Christianity. Perhaps it is not altogether foreign to the present train of reflection to consider the force of this objection. That nature abounds with mysteries our author is willing to allow in its utmost extent. But he denies that mystery can be applied to moral truth more than obscurity to light. "The God in whom we believe" says he, "is a God of moral truth, and therefore religion being the belief of a God and the practice of moral truth cannot have connection with mystery," When a man assumes principles at random, he may infer any conclusions from them he pleases. None but a novice in morals, or one who wished to offer a wanton insult to those that are versed in the science, would ever have presumed to adopt Mr. Paine's hypothesis. Every smatterer in the study, however superficial, is sensible that moral truths are not capable of the same degree of evidence with abstract propositions, and that after the largest accumulation of proofs, the most important questions are frequently left in considerable dubiety. This, however, is a small part of the obscurity in which they are involved. When we come to examine the mode of their existence and to investigate the reasons

reasons of particular appearances in the moral world, we are inclosed on every side by mystery, and are unable to extricate ourselves from the labyrinth. That there is a spirit in man distinct from the material substance of which his body is formed almost every person firmly believes: but in what the nature or essence of this spirit consists, the human mind exercises itself in vain to discover. That God is infinite in perfection, none who have right apprehensions of the Supreme Being, will deny; though at the same time it must be owned, that our ideas of infinity are limited and obscure. The existence of moral evil needs no proof, we feel it in ourselves, we cannot look around us without observing it in the world; but from whence it came, or how it can obtain under the government of an infinitely good and holy God, is a difficulty which long puzzled the mind of man and which his reason never could solve. In short, there is not a subject in all the science of morals, to which mystery may not be applied. Revelation then, considered even as a republication of the religion of nature, could not be expected to be perfectly plain in every point, since there are many doctrines of natural religion, about the evidence of which we can entertain no doubt that are replete with difficulties. An explication of these difficulties would have been of little importance to the generality of mankind, and perhaps is not suited to the rank which our spirits hold in creation,

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tion difficulties upon any subject being merely relative to the understandings of those who consider it. As the Gospel makes provision for a new situation to which the discoveries of religion were inadequate, difficulties may be expected both concerning the manner of the interposition by which this provision was to be made, and concerning the nature of the beings whose agency the interposition involves. *Μυστήριον* in the scripture use of the word denotes not what is incomprehensible, but what was unknown till it pleased God to reveal it. Now if there had been no mysteries of this kind in Scripture, it would have been the strongest proof that no revelation was needed, because human reason was adequate to every necessary discovery, whereas such mysteries (and we acknowledge no other) affords a presumption that the books in which they are resolved are not the work of man, because the resolutions lye beyond the sphere of human invention.

The last objection of Mr. Paine which I shall take notice of upon this branch of evidence is, that by which he accounts for the general reception of the Christian system from its correspondence with the heathen mythology. A little ago we found Mr. Paine solemnly asserting that Christianity had induced a revolution in theology, and now he represents its author as accommodating his system to the prejudices and received opinions

of the times. But our author is not scrupulous about incurring the imputation of falsehood or inconsistency, if by having recourse to either he can promote his design of deceiving the credulous and undiscerning. For this purpose he varies his mode of attack, lays aside the heavy arms of reason, and assumes the lighter weapons of ludicrous description and impudent buffoonry. He erects revelation into a stage: Jupiter and the giants are placed as its supporters: His Satanic majesty is introduced in the habit of a mountebank: and Mr. Paine, with considerable adroitness, acts as his fool. This piece of buffoonry may do very well for a specimen to the world of the character in which our author is formed to excell; but considered as an attack upon our religion, it is a libel against truth, the very essence of absurdity, stupidity and nonsense. One illustrious author whose literary attainments have conferred upon his writings as fair a claim to immortality as learning misapplied can bestow, endeavoured to establish ridicule into a criterion of truth. His attempt miscarried, though supported by all the elegance of wit and the attractions of raillery. Mr. Paine, who, compared with the Earl of Shaftesbury, is like the sow at its vomit, has renewed the attempt, but with proportionably less success, as his ridicule is more coarse and his wit less refined. A calm attention and a cool sobriety of mind are the most proper dispositions for discovering and judging

ing of truth. A strong turn to ridicule disqualifies a man for tranquil deliberate reflection, and renders him impatient of the labour which rational search requires. By means of jest and witticism the face of truth is easily disguised, and few have penetration sufficient to distinguish the natural appearances of things from the mask when it is artfully put on. Not much, however, is to be apprehended from Mr. Paine's satirical more than from his reasoning powers, and as I reckon the present piece of impious drollery unworthy of a more particular criticism, I simply appeal to Moses's account of the fall for a confutation of the fable which he has built upon it.

I have now shewn from a review of the circumstances of the times, that a Revelation would have been of the last importance to mankind, from which I presumed that it is not improbable that a Revelation was given. I have shewn also that there is nothing in the Jewish or the Christian revelations either absurd in itself or inconsistent with the pure dictates of natural religion, from which I conclude, that they are worthy of God, and may have come from heaven. I proceed to consider the direct and positive proofs of their divine original. Mr. Paine takes notice of them in the last pages of his pamphlet under the common division of miracles and prophecy.

Miracles have been variously defined. In respect to the power of God, and the nature of things, every possible action is equally easy to be performed; and, therefore, the idea of a miracle ought never to be derived from the seeming difficulty of the action performed. Since difficulty (as we had occasion to mention before) is entirely a relative term, and since it is impossible to say how far the higher orders of beings in the universe excell us in power, and what opportunities they are allowed of exercising their powers upon visible objects, a miracle is also improperly designed, what is above the natural powers of created agents to execute. The definitions that it is a deviation from the usual course of nature, or that it is a violation or suspension of her established laws, are only so far just as they imply a change in God's usual manner of acting upon matter, effected either immediately by himself, or mediately by the interposition of some created, intelligent being, in subserviency to his will. For there is no such thing as an established course, or established laws inherent in nature. They are nothing more than the will of God, operating upon matter in a continued and regular manner, and thus producing constant and uniform effects. Dr. Clarke has most properly defined a miracle to be " a
 " work effected in a manner unusual, or different
 " from the common and regular method of pro-
 " vidence by the interposition of God himself, or
 " of

“ of some intelligent agent superior to man for
 “ the proof or evidence of some particular doc-
 “ trine, or in attestation to the authority of some
 “ particular person.” When the doctrine is nei-
 ther absurd in itself, nor vicious in its conse-
 quences, if attested by a miracle which is not op-
 posed by a superior power, it ought to be confi-
 dered as divine, and its author, as possessing a com-
 mission from God. The grounds of evidence are
 these---that the will of God considered as operat-
 ing upon the works of nature, is stable and per-
 manent---that from this uniformity of operation
 there results what is vulgarly called a regular sys-
 tem of established laws, from which no deviation
 is expected, and never takes place except it be to
 subserve some important design---that such a de-
 viation originates in the will of God; and there-
 fore, when an appeal is made to such a deviation,
 as an evidence of a divine commission, it will not
 be answered, except the claims be good, because
 the God of truth will not affix the seal of Heaven
 to a lye. But, says Mr. Paine---“ Mankind have
 “ conceived to themselves certain laws by which
 “ what they call nature, is supposed to act, and
 “ that a miracle is something contrary to the opera-
 “ tion and effect of those laws. But unless we
 “ know the whole extent of those laws, and of
 “ what are commonly called the powers of nature,
 “ we are not able to judge whether any thing
 “ that may appear to us wonderful or miraculous
 “ lie

" lye within or beyond, or be contrary to her na-
 " tural power of acting. As, therefore, we know
 " not the extent to which either nature or art can
 " go, there is no positive criterion to determine
 " what a miracle is; and mankind in giving cre-
 " dit to appearances, under the idea of their
 " being miracles, are subject to be continually
 " imposed upon."---Of all the objections that ever
 have been offered against the evidence of miracles,
 this is the most frivolous and untenable. Though
 perhaps we cannot explore many of the hidden
 tracts of nature, nor ascertain the utmost extent
 of her laws, yet we are sufficiently acquainted
 with her ordinary mode of procedure in common
 cases, to be struck with the slightest depar-
 ture from her usual course of operation. This
 knowledge is attained by an uniform observation,
 founded upon an uniform experience; and, there-
 fore, is more to be depended upon than any
 knowledge whatever, because there can be neither
 mistake in the teacher, nor misconception in the
 person instructed. I know that it is appointed
 unto all men once to die, and that from the tomb
 the captive is never released. I know that disease
 will not vanish at the command of man, and that the
 tempest will not confess his sway. These are facts
 which daily experience pronounce to be true, and
 concerning which there can be no deception.
 Nature in the common course of things uniformly
 acts respecting them in the same way, and they
 cannot

cannot exist otherwise, except that course be changed. When I see, therefore, the dead arise, the deaf hear, the blind see, the lame walk, and the storm cease to rage at the word of man, neither the wonders of electricity or animal magnetism, nor optical or mechanical deceptions can account for such extraordinary phenomena. The change has taken place in that sphere of nature's operations in which I was most conversant, and it is perfectly unaccountable upon any other supposition, than a temporary departure from the common arrangements of providence.

But this objection, allowing it its utmost weight, is inefficient to destroy the evidence that is founded upon miracles, for granting them in the sense of Mr. Paine to be within the extent of nature's laws, and to be only peculiarities in her mode of procedure, which lie beyond the reach of human capacity to discover, it is necessary to suppose every pretender to a divine commission, who hath supported his pretensions by appeals to these peculiarities to have possessed a knowledge unattainable by human reason, which must have been by consequence communicated to him from Heaven; which is equally the same as if the miracles were wrought on purpose to attest his mission.

“ Of all the modes of evidence that ever were
 “ invented to obtain belief to any system or opi-
 “ nion

" nion to which the name of religion has been
 " given that of miracle, however successful the
 " imposition may have been is the most incon-
 " sistent. For, in the first place, whenever re-
 " course is had to show for the purpose of pro-
 " curing that belief (for a miracle under any idea
 " of the word is a show) it implies a lameness or
 " weakness in the doctrine that is preached. And
 " in the second place it is degrading the Almighty
 " into the character of a showman playing tricks
 " to amuse and make the people stare and wonder.
 " It is also the most equivocal sort of evidence, for
 " if we are to suppose a miracle to be something
 " so intirely out of the course of what is called na-
 " ture, that she must go out of that course to ac-
 " complish it, and we see an account given of
 " such miracle by the person who said he saw it,
 " it raises a question in the mind very easily de-
 " cided, which is, is it more probable that nature
 " should go out of her course, or that a man should
 " tell a lie?" The first of these objections is
 founded upon improper notions of the strength
 of internal evidence, the second upon a low and
 absurd idea of the nature of miracles and the last
 upon a false and ridiculous system of scepticism.
 No innate sublimity nor intrinsic excellence unac-
 companied with other evidence can give any
 system of doctrine or morality a claim upon the
 respect or reception of a divine revelation. The
 highest degree of evidence which the internal cha-
 racter

rafter of a revelation can convey is only presumptive. When we examine a doctrine, if its nature and tendency be good, all that we can infer is that it is worthy of God. If it seem to surpass the powers of human invention, this affords a presumption that it is of superior origin. Still however this would only be a partial presumption; for as mankind differ in their ideas of the human capacity, they would vary in their opinions respecting the degree of penetration which is competent to the discovery of the doctrine. Some would receive it as the word of man, others might assign it a higher author, and many would reject it altogether, as finding nothing in it to humour their follies or to encourage their vices. When the most high condescends to become the instructor of His creatures, he speaks to them with an evidence which they cannot misinterpret. He acts not like a show-man or a jugler (terms of reproach which the daring impiety of Mr. Paine hath employed) but as the sovereign ruler of the universe, making the course of nature to attest the operations of his will. Are these childish tricks, that the sea should divide, that the sun should stand still, that natural evil should make a silent retreat before the anointed of the Lord, and that corruption should yield up her prey at his command? This is an evidence fitted to strike and to convince wherever it is proposed. It depends not upon abstract principles of philosophy, nor is it derived by tedious and ab-

struse inductions. It is suited to all capacities and to every period of society.

Mr. Paine states his last objection as if a miracle must depend upon the testimony of a single individual without any assignable reason for so extraordinary an event, and when thus proposed naked of all circumstances, it must be allowed to have an odd appearance. The occasion on which miracles are performed must always be worthy of such an interference, and the strength of the evidence from testimony must always increase in proportion to the improbability of the events recorded. The same reasons by which the Supreme Being was influenced to grant a revelation to man would actuate him to accompany it with such evidence as might justify its pretensions to the world: and if it was becoming his character to confer the revelation, he could not in justice to the revelation reasonably deny the evidence. The miraculous events which accompanied the first propagation of Christianity are recorded upon the testimony of witnesses so numerous, and at the same time so credible that the truth of the facts cannot admit of dispute, except to a mind prone to cavil for the sake of being singular, or eager to reject the evidence, because it is not for its interest to admit the doctrines. When Mr. Paine asks then whether it is more probable that nature should go out of her regular course, or that a man should tell
a lie

a lie, the question is unfairly proposed: it ought rather to be thus stated: whether supposing it worthy of God to confer the power of working miracles upon one divinely commissioned to deliver a revelation to mankind, it be more probable that miracles were really performed in evidence of Christianity, or that the Apostles and all the first Christians were liars, and that the nation of the Jews and all the enemies of the religion of Jesus connived at the fraud.

Mr. Paine adds "We have never seen in our
 "time nature go out of her course; but we have
 "good reason to believe that millions of lies have
 "been told in our time. It is therefore at least
 "millions to one that the reporter of a miracle
 "tells a lie."---Vice is not more detestable when
 clothed in the garb of virtue, nor irreligion when
 veiled with the mask of hypocrisy, than absurdities
 when attempted to be imposed upon the mind
 in a logical dress. Does Mr. Paine imagine that in
 an age of reason such impositions can be practised
 without detection, and that a round assertion accompanied
 with a but, and a therefore, constitutes all that is
 required in argument. Before he had concluded that it is
 at least millions to one that the reporter of a miracle
 tells a lie, he should have shewn that the millions of
 lies which he believes have been told in his time were
 fabricated by reporters of miracles. We have never seen Alex-

ander the Great in our time, but we have good reason to believe that thousands of lies have been told in our time; therefore it is thousands to one that Quintus Curtius and all his historians are liars. The reasoning in the parody is not more false than that in the original. Shame on thee, Thomas Paine! such argumentation is more like the sophistical quibbles of a monk of the middle ages inured to the arts of cheatry and deception, than the enlightened discussions of a legislator of the eighteenth century.

To the miracle of our Lord's resurrection our author starts two objections. The first is that he did not appear publicly to the Jews, and the second, that it was never credited by them. The best reasons may be assigned for both. Considering the inveterate malice which they had displayed against Jesus Christ, and the obstinacy of their prejudices, there was no probability of their assenting to any evidence which could be given. They had ascribed his miracles to the agency of the Devil, and the resurrection of Lazarus from the grave suggested a wish to take away his life. Instead of being convinced by the testimony of the soldiers who were placed over the tomb of Jesus, they bribed them to be silent. And if our Lord had publicly appeared to them after his passion, and they had pretended it was a spectre or delusion and had refused to acknowledge him, it would

would have been urged as a strong presumption against the reality of his resurrection. The unbelief of the Jews may easily be accounted for from national partialities. To a son of Abraham the idea of a Catholic church seemed ignoble and degrading. To the first born of the house of Levi the naked simplicity of the religion of the prophet of Galilee appeared barren and uninviting. And to a descendant of the king of Israel expecting to be the father of a progeny who at the head of the millions of Juda should lead them on to victory and triumph, till a tributary world should bow in subjection to the sceptre of the house of David, the history of the martyr of Beth-lem would wear no charm. Their prejudices then were too stubborn to yield to the force of any evidence whatever. But the miracles recorded in the New Testament were to the disciples, and those who were impartial eye-witnesses of them, sensible demonstrations of a divine commission; and to us they are as certain demonstrations of the same truth as the testimony of these eye-witnesses, which we formerly established as unexceptionable, is certain and true.

The last branch of evidence which falls to be considered is that of prophecy. As early as the days of the first parents of the human race, a scheme of prophecy commenced, which though at the beginning mysterious and symbolical, unfolded

folded itself through a succession of ages, and gradually became more pointed and explicit as the æra of their accomplishment drew nigh, when after the revolutions of forty centuries, they were completely fulfilled in the person and fortunes of Jesus of Nazareth. For the son of Mary being the only person to whom the prophecies could with any propriety be applied, and every circumstance which was foretold, having received its full accomplishment in him, we have every reason to believe that he was the person to whom the prophecies referred. But in the prophecies of the Old Testament the person who is there predicted is called the Son of God, the messenger of his covenant, the servant of the Lord, and his elect, in whom his soul is well pleased; and the contingent events of futurity ever inscrutable to human sagacity, being only discoverable by that Omniscient Being, who knoweth the end from the beginning, we have not only the fullest evidence that Jesus was the object in which all the prophecies terminated, but we have the highest authority to believe that he was a teacher sent from Heaven.

But this is only one branch of prophetic evidence. Jesus Christ not only fulfilled the Old Testament prophecies, he himself was endowed with the spirit of prediction, and foretold in minute and accurate detail, both the events of his own life,

life, and the future fortunes of his church. Now it is not to be supposed that the Deity would impart his own prescience to give credit to an impostor, who falsely pretended to be inspired by him to deliver doctrines and laws to mankind.

Mr. Paine objects to the evidence of prophecy in general, because even though it be real, it is not calculated to answer the purpose for which it was designed to those to whom it is first delivered, and he rejects the prophecies of the Old Testament, as not affording any proof of the divinity of the New, on account of the loose, obscure and equivocal terms in which they were expressed. As the accomplishment of predictions can be the only proper evidence of their truth, the argument from prophecy may be considered as more particularly addressed to future times, than to the age in which the prophecies are delivered. The evidence of miracles falls, the evidence of prophecy rises with the lapse of time. But though the prophecies did not afford so strong an evidence of the truth of revelation, when they were delivered, as after the period of their fulfilment; this is surely a sorry reason for rejecting their present evidence. It is our business not to conform our faith to their original evidence, but to compare the predictions with the events, and from their correspondence or disagreement, to infer the inspiration, or the imposture of those who delivered them. Besides they

they were not altogether destitute of evidence, even in the age in which they were written, for many of the predictions related to things which were speedily to happen, and the exact fulfilment of these afforded a presumption that those which referred to more distant events would in due time receive their accomplishment. A certain degree of obscurity in the language of prophecy was required by the nature of that dispensation of religion, in which they obtained particularly toward its commencement; but this gradually diminished as the circumstances of the times admitted, and as the æra of their fulfilment drew nigh, insomuch that many passages in Isaiah seem rather like circumstantial and accurate relations of what had really happened, than loose or equivocal predictions of what might or might not come to pass.

I have now completed my answer to *The Age of Reason*. How far I have been successful in my replies I leave an impartial public to determine. When Mr. Paine's publication fell into my hands, I read it with that contempt which its futility deserves, but with that horror with which the popularity of the author, and the miserable tendency of such a production (introduced into vulgar circulation) would naturally inspire every friend to the interests of man. Religion has nothing to apprehend from such attacks; but the faith of the multitude is unstable, and easily shaken. I thought
of

of their weakness, and it grieved me that they should fall a prey to a deceiver, that they should tamely surrender the friend of their youth, and the staff of their age to the enemy of their peace. Upon this principle I entered the lists with Mr. Paine, not an unwilling adversary. I pretend not to have added any new support to the evidence of revelation; but if I have exposed his sophistry, and detected his arts of delusion; if I have confirmed one doubting mind, or reclaimed one proselyte which his pamphlet had gained, I shall account my time well spent, and my trouble amply recompenced. Poor and obscure, my name is little known, and my influence is little felt, but if from the cell of obscurity the fervent ejaculation of an upright mind can reach the Heavens, I earnestly implore the God of truth, and the sovereign ruler of the universe, to protect our government and religion from the rude attack of every impious assailant, to confound every hostile purpose that may be formed against our Church and King, and to banish from our land every thing which can hurt or destroy that glorious fabric of happiness which his own arm hath reared.

F I N I S.

of their weakness, and it proved me that
I should fall a prey to a deceiver, that they should
tamefully surrender to the hand of their enemy, and the
rest of their way to the camp of their enemy.
Upon this principle I entered the city with them.
I came, not as a conqueror, but as a prisoner.
I have not a single word to say in support of the evidence of
revelation; but I have a word to say in support of
and defend the cause of revelation; and I have con-
fessed the doctrine of truth, or revelation, pro-
bably which this paper has gained, I shall ac-
count my time well spent, and my trouble amply
repaid. I am and shall be, my friends, is
kind friends, and my influence is great, but it
from the call of duty, the fervent expectation
of an eternal reward, and the love of heaven, I
cannot but praise the God of truth, and the in-
visible ruler of the universe, to protect our po-
sition, and to defend us from the rage of
every man's tongue, to defend every honest
person, and to defend our Church
and King, and to defend our land, and
every man, and every woman, and every
child, and every creature, and every
thing, and every man, and every woman, and every
child, and every creature, and every thing.

4 Oct 58

